



## OPENING STATEMENT FOR GREG WALDEN

### SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH

#### OVERSIGHT HEARING ON

#### *REFORESTATION PROBLEMS ON NATIONAL FORESTS: A GAO REPORT ON THE INCREASING BACKLOG*

*APRIL 27, 2005*

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That we are celebrating our 131<sup>st</sup> Arbor Day this Friday, reminds us that tree-planting and reforestation are issues near and dear to the American people. As Europeans initially migrated to our continent a typical consequence of that settlement was deforestation, primarily as a consequence of the conversion of forests to cropland. The large majority of Americans, during the first three centuries of U.S. history, were farmers. Between 1850 and 1910, Americans cleared over 190 million acres of forests for crops and pasture, while using wood for cooking and heating, home construction and fence building.

During that time, lumber production grew at twice the rate as the population. By 1850 more than 90% of the nation's energy came from wood. In addition, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, virtually all iron produced in the country was smelted using wood charcoal. By 1900, over 15 million acres of forest land were needed just for the production of railroad ties and trestle. Without exaggeration we can say that America was built on wood---but not without cost. Forest depletion in the East was rampant. One traveler wrote in the early 1800's that he passed only about 20 miles of woodland on the 240-mile trip between Boston and New York. Over time, the resulting impacts on wildlife populations and water quality became painfully obvious.

Much of America's conservation movement sprouted out of the growing awareness of the economic and environmental impacts of deforestation. Names such as Fernow, Roosevelt, and Pinchot and organizations such as the American Forestry Association and the Boone and Crockett Club encouraged the reforestation and productive management of private forest lands through tax incentives and financial assistance, promoted forest research and the creation of college forestry curricula, helped adopt wildlife conservation laws and promoted the protection and wise-use of forests through the creation of federal

forest reserves and the establishment, exactly 100 years ago, of the Forest Service. By the 1920s, the 300-year loss of American forest land had virtually stopped. Today, even with the large increase in population, we have about the same number of forested acres than we did in 1920.

Even with these successes and even though our knowledge of forestry and reforestation has grown significantly in the last hundred years, we still find that important issues need to be addressed. Once again, the GAO has aptly assisted the Committee in understanding essential aspects of this subject through the report it's issuing today. In particular, the estimated backlog of reforestation and timber stand improvement needs, primarily on national forests, is addressed in their report. The main reason for today's hearing, therefore, is to shed light on how the backlog is determined, why it's increasing, how reforestation is funded and potential solutions for addressing reforestation and timber stand improvement concerns.

While reforestation issues, like all forest issues, are complex, most Americans have learned the importance of keeping our national forests forested, for wildlife, water quality, scenic beauty and all the other values that growing, diverse forests provide. I look forward to hearing what the GAO, the agencies, and our visiting forest professionals have to offer on this important subject.